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ABSTRACT

In its first 18 months of operation the Centre has undertaken research on major issues and problems in rural education. Its publications have been received favorably, both in Australia and overseas. Visiting scholars from Alaska and Canada have made valuable contributions to the Centre's activities and have increased its links with agencies overseas. Two scholarships have been awarded to research students to undertake investigation of particular aspects of rural education, and the Centre's staff have participated in conferences attended by people with extensive interests in the field. The Centre has been a source of advice to public authorities, private agencies, and local communities about problems related to rural education. The Centre has established a presence in the field, and the tasks immediately before it are to diversify its program and consolidate its standing as a national research unit. Planning for future growth and development, however, must take into account competition for scarce resources. The report consists of a preamble and sections on staff, visiting scholars, scholarships, publications and reports, contact with organizations involved in rural education, research activities (commissioned research, funded research, core research, and information services), and future prospects.
(Author/BRR)

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NATIONAL CENTRE FOR RESEARCH ON RURAL EDUCATION

Report 1981-82

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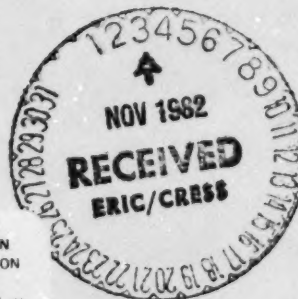
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THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA
NEDLANDS, WESTERN AUSTRALIA

1982



NCRRE

AC 01 3760

Preamble

The idea for a national research centre emerged from an international conference 'New Directions in Rural Education', held in Perth in November 1979 under the auspices of the Paris-based Centre for Research and Innovation (CERI) of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). There were frequent calls during the conference for further research. Western Australia was seen to be uniquely suited to the task because of its geographic size and the problems which its scattered and shifting population pose, and because it is undergoing changes and developments in its rural areas, especially those which are centres of mining activity. The University of Western Australia's Department of Education and the Education Department of Western Australia responded to the recommendations for research and collaborated in a proposal to establish the National Centre for Research on Rural Education. Their initiative has been commended by scholars in Australia and overseas. As a national research unit focussing on issues and problems in rural education, the Centre is not only the first of its kind in Australia, but it is one of the few in the world.

The aims of the National Centre for Research on Rural Education are:

- to undertake research on major issues and problems in rural education;
- to provide an opportunity for research students to undertake investigations in rural education;
- to publish and disseminate the results of research as widely as possible;
- to sponsor periods of residence in Western Australia by scholars and others interested in and able to contribute to research and development in rural education;
- to maintain links with other national research agencies which have demonstrated interests in rural education;
- to support relevant in-service activities in rural education or in the preparation of teachers for service in rural schools;
- to act as a potential source of advice to government and private authorities, and local communities, about problems related to rural education.

The agreement between the university and the government of Western Australia provides that:

the Centre is located at the University of Western Australia, which is responsible for providing accommodation and basic services;

the state government makes a cash contribution of an agreed amount (adjusted annually to maintain constant value) equal to one-third of the cost of maintaining the Centre, and the university provides the remainder;

where available and appropriate, the Education Department will contribute other resources, and access by the Centre staff to schools and departmental sources of data will be facilitated wherever possible;

the Centre is accountable through a Board of Management to the state Minister for Education and the University of Western Australia.

The Centre differs from traditional university units in that some of its activities and ways of proceeding are decided by a body representative of more than university personnel. It is a partnership of state and Catholic education authorities, the Commonwealth Schools Commission, and the University of Western Australia. The organizational structure provides for the planning of research activities in a way that recognizes and considers the interests of various parties. The Centre is expected to carry out its programs as a typical university research unit. Concomitantly, it is expected that programs will be developed in cooperation with government and non-government schools, other government agencies, parent groups, and various community organizations concerned with improving education in rural Australia. Thus, the Centre is simultaneously a formally constituted research unit within the University and a small semi-autonomous research group.

The organizational chart (p. 3) illustrates the relationship of the Centre staff to the Board of Management and the university administration. The board sets program direction and the university exercises control over operational procedures. The Board of Management consists of representatives of the university, the state Education Department, representatives from other states and national research and education agencies, non-government schools in Western Australia, and business and industry in rural Australia. It is intended that the membership of the board will remain flexible and open to allow entry of a range of interests. The members of the inaugural Board of Management were:

Dr D. Mossenson (Chairman)
Director-General of Education
Western Australia

Mr M. J. Angus
Assistant Director
Research Branch
Education Department of Western Australia

Mrs S. Broad
Wagga Wagga Station
Yaloo, Western Australia

Mr S. S. Dunn
Chairman
Education Research and Development
Committee
Canberra

Mr D. Fischer
Chairman of Commissioners
Rural and Industries Bank of Western Australia

Mr W. Hamilton
✓ Deputy Director-General of Education
Queensland

Dr J. A. Kelly
Division of Education and Research
The Ford Foundation
New York

Father J. Nestor
Chairman
Catholic Education Commission of
Western Australia

Professor P. D. Tannock
Professor of Education and Head Department of Education
University of Western Australia

Professor W. R. Stern
Professor of Agronomy
University of Western Australia

Several changes in the composition of the board occurred in the first eighteen months of the Centre's operation.

- Dr Mossenson retired from the position of Director-General of Education in February 1982 and was replaced as Chairman by Dr R. L. Vickery, his successor as Director-General. In recognition of his part in establishing the Centre, the Board of Management invited Dr Mossenson to continue as a member.
- Mr Dunn retired as Chairman of ERDC and Dr J. A. Kelly withdrew after the Ford Foundation reviewed its involvement in educational research.
- Professor Tannock resigned from the University of Western Australia in December 1980 to become Chairman of the Commonwealth Schools Commission, Canberra. He has continued as a member and his successor as Head of the Department of Education, Dr I. K. F. Birch, replaced him as an executive member of the Board.
- Ms Margaret Valadian, Director of the Aboriginal Training and Cultural Institute, New South Wales, joined the Board at the beginning of 1982.

The board has direct responsibility for the efficient management of the Centre and its research activities. It provides direction in the expenditure of Centre funds and is instrumental in identifying areas for research and sources of financial support. The principal concern is to give direction to the Centre so that its research efforts are applied to subjects thought to have the greatest potential for improving rural education.

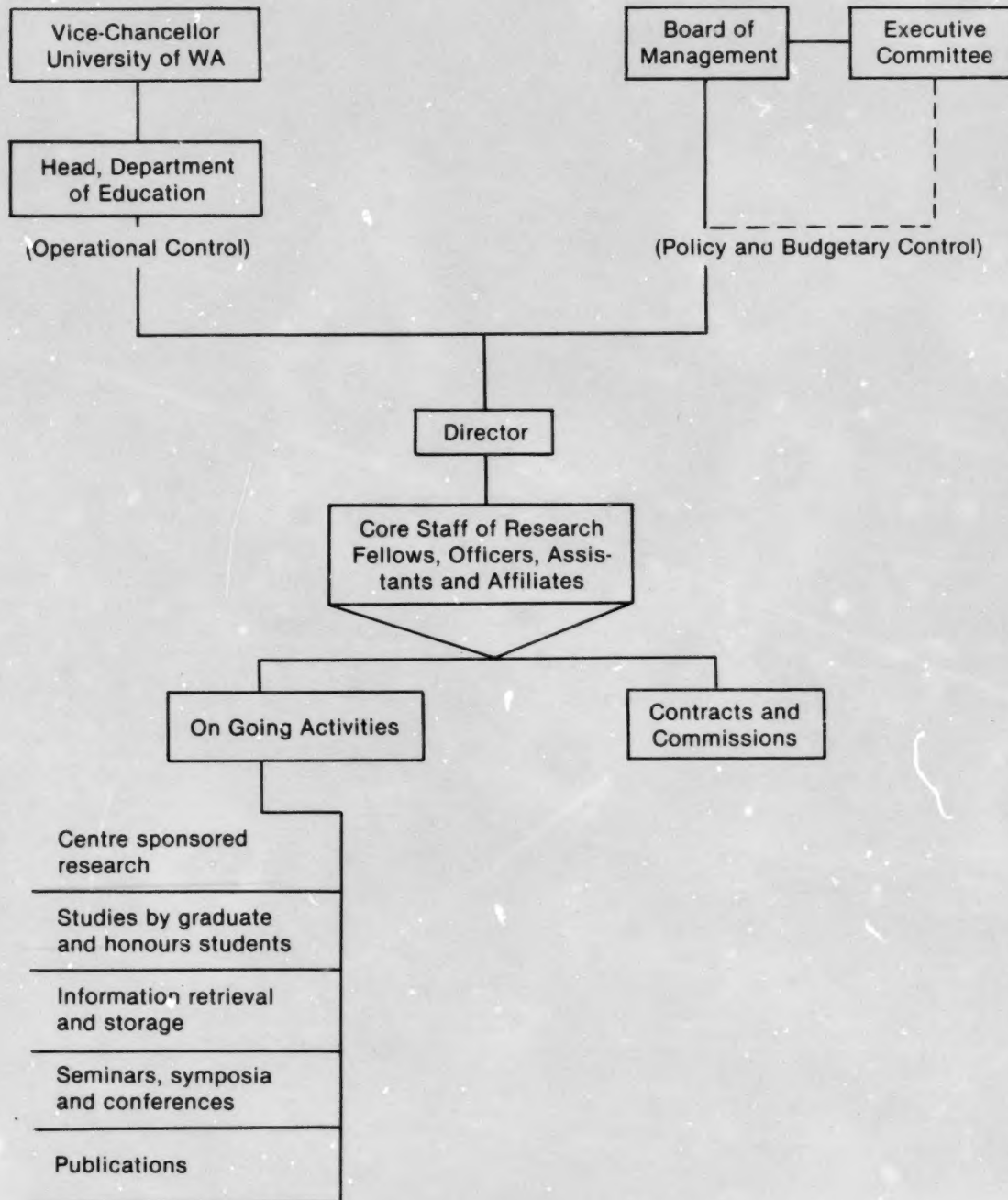
Since the inception of the Centre, the board has met six times. Between meetings, management of the Centre is vested in an executive committee consisting of the Director-General of Education, the Head of the university Department of Education and the Director of the Centre.

Staff

The regular staff of the Centre consists of the director, a research fellow, a research assistant and a secretary. These positions are limited term appointments to the university staff. Other persons may become affiliated with the Centre as research fellows, research officers, or research assistants for the life of specific research projects carried out through special grants, commissions or contracts. The director and the research fellow are temporary academic appointments within the Department of Education and they relate to that department and its head as normal staff members. The director is responsible to the Board of Management for the operation of the Centre. The inaugural director was Emeritus Professor Frank Darnell, BSc (Colorado State), MEd (Alaska), EdD (Michigan). He was formerly Professor of Education and Director of the Centre for Northern Educational Research at the University of Alaska. He served as director from November 1980 to December 1981. The present director, Derrick Tomlinson, BA, MEd (W. Aust.), was appointed in February 1982 he was formerly a lecturer with a joint appointment in the Departments of Education and English at this university. Mr Andrew Higgins, MEd (Queensland), was appointed as a research fellow for a two-year term commencing July 1981. He was formerly a lecturer at James Cook University, Townsville.

Mrs Patricia Simpson, BA(Hons) (W. Aust.), was appointed as a research assistant for one year in January 1981. That appointment was subsequently extended for a further year. Mrs Simpson has had extensive experience in research with Professor G. C. Bolton and Professor E. M. Johnston. Mrs Helen Williams, BA, served as secretary to the Centre between February and August 1981. Mrs Pauline Edwards has been secretary since September 1981.

ORGANISATIONAL CHART



CONFERENCES ATTENDED

Professor Darnell

Australian College of Education
Alice Springs and Darwin, 14-20 May, 1981
Address: 'Rural Education: A New Research
Centre Looks at Some Perennial Problems'

Mr Higgins

Isolated Children's Parents' Association,
Federal Council
Annual General Meeting, Bourke, 29-30 July,
1981
Address: 'The National Centre for Research
on Rural Education'

Mr Tomlinson

Isolated Children's Parents' Association,
Western Australia
Annual General Meeting, Perth, 15 February,
1982
Address: 'The Review of the Assistance for
Isolated Children Scheme'

Commonwealth Schools Commission, Coun-
try Workshop,
Dubbo, 10-13 May, 1982
Address: 'Living Away From Home Allow-
ances and the Country Areas Program'

International Council of Correspondence
Education, Twelfth World Conference,
University of British Columbia, Vancouver,
Canada, 9-15 June, 1982

Isolated Children's Parents' Association,
Federal Council Annual General Meeting,
Alice Springs, 28-29 July, 1982

Australian College of Education, Western
Australian Chapter State Conference, Man-
durah, 31 July-1 August, 1982

Reactor to Keynote address by Dr Katharine
West: 'A View on the Future'

WORK-IN-PROGRESS SEMINARS

To disseminate information about work in progress
and to elicit suggestions about the research program
and methods for particular projects, four informal
seminars were conducted at the university in 1981.
Members of the academic staff and other interested
persons from outside the university were invited to
attend. The seminar topics were:

September 29

Education of Isolated Australian Youth
F. Darnell and A. Higgins

October 13:

District High Schools: The Canadian and
Australian Experience

J. Davis

October 27:

Training Teachers for Rural Schools
M. Lake

November 10:

English Language Proficiency of Pilbara
Migrants
D. Tomlinson

Visiting Scholars

One aspect of the Centre's program is to sponsor
periods of residence by Australian and overseas
scholars who will contribute to research and develop-
ment in rural education. Two visiting scholars have
spent time at the Centre in 1981-82. Dr M. Gaffney,
Director of the Alaska Native Studies Program at the
University of Alaska, was resident between January
and June 1981. His research related to the education
of Aborigines in remote areas of Western Australia.
Dr Gaffney is preparing two papers which draw upon
his experience here. The first is a comprehensive case
for the training of Aboriginal teachers to work in
predominantly Aboriginal schools in rural areas. The
second has been given the tentative title, 'The Social
Meaning of Educational Development: The Cases of
Australian Aborigines and Alaska Natives'. The pur-
pose of this second paper is to compare the social
contexts within which education takes place for both
peoples.

Dr John Davis worked at the Centre between
August 1981 and June 1982 while on sabbatical leave
from his position as Head of the Midwestern Centre
of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (in
the interim he was appointed as Executive Head,
Field Services and Extension Office, OISE). He
researched program organisation in district high
schools. The study addressed a major area of concern
raised during the 1979 OECD/CERI conference, that
of curricula for rural schools.

In his research Dr Davis focussed on the restricted
nature of curriculum in small schools. In examining
how that problem is, or might be, resolved in district
high schools, the perceptions of administrators,
teachers, students and parents were reviewed. The
survey involved forty-seven of Western Australia's
(then) fifty-five district high schools. Factors which
constrain the development of curricula by individual
schools were identified. They included the high turn-
over of staff, teacher inexperience, the role of school
administrators, and difficulties of access to support
staff and advisory personnel in rural areas. Among
the suggestions presented in the report were innova-
tions through, for example, the introduction of tech-
nical science courses as alternatives to approved

science courses, the introduction of areas of study rather than particular subjects in the core curriculum, and the use of distance education materials to facilitate diversity of program which makes minimum demands for specialised teachers in every school.

In addition to his major report, Dr Davis submitted a paper entitled 'Correspondence Courses: A New Role in Rural Secondary Education' to the journal, *The Rural Educator*. It has been accepted for publication.

NCRRE Scholarships

The Centre offers scholarships to the value of \$8,000 per annum for PhD candidates and \$6,000 per annum for MEd candidates. Awards at both levels also qualify for dependants' allowance at the current rate of the Commonwealth postgraduate awards. The purpose of the scholarships is to provide opportunities for research students to undertake investigation in rural education which will form part of the thesis requirements for higher degrees or form a basis for satisfactory post-doctoral programs. Those awards were formalised as University of Western Australia scholarships in June, 1982.

Two doctoral scholarships have been awarded. Mr Murray Lake took up an award in March 1981. His research proposal was approved in October 1981. The topic for Mr Lake's thesis is 'The Pre-service preparation of Teachers for Rural Schools in Western Australia'. Professor T. A. Priest is supervising the research.

The study is concerned with the significant portion of neophyte teachers in Western Australia's government schools who begin their teaching careers in small rural communities. It is based on the proposition that such teachers receive little or no pre-service preparation related to the specific needs of their assignments. Although there has been a renewal of interest in rural education in many countries in the last decade, training institutions have failed to respond to the needs that have been identified. The universal difficulties faced by teachers in their initial years of service are compounded in many instances by social estrangement, organisational complexity, and a degree of professional isolation.

The focus of the research program is full-time beginning primary teachers in non-specialist government schools in rural communities of less than 1000 persons. The study will examine their perceptions of the social and educational environments of their present situation and the perceived adequacy of their

pre-service preparation. To this end, a questionnaire has been distributed to beginning teachers in defined schools. Base line data will be compiled from the responses to the questionnaires, and a sample of respondents for interview will be identified. This latter procedure was adopted as an appropriate means of gaining access to the nuances embedded in the responses.

An anticipated outcome of the study is that analysis of the perceptions of beginning teachers in small rural communities will lead to an amelioration of relevant aspects of teacher education programs. More importantly, it is hoped that the learning of rural youth will be improved through better preparation of teachers for rural schools.

Miss Anne Butorac was awarded a scholarship in March 1982. She had previously completed six months' work toward her doctorate at Macquarie University, New South Wales. The research proposal was approved in September 1982. The study will explore the work code of primary school children by means of an ethnographic case study of a rural community. It is being supervised by Dr I. K. F. Birch and Dr M. L. Herriman.

The basic proposition being examined is that knowledge and organisation of work in a society is shared by individuals through a work code similar to the grammar of a language and is acquired by individuals at an early age. The program to test that proposition will take into account children's ideas about work, their work experience, the work domain of the community in which they live, and the future work roles they envisage for themselves.

The method of research is derived from anthropology and will involve approximately twelve months of field work. In that time Miss Butorac will live in the community she is studying. During July 1982 the program was field-tested at Goldsworthy. Some exploratory work to validate the strategies of inquiry was undertaken. The setting for the major study has not been confirmed, but assistance has been offered by Education Department personnel in the South-West (country) and Upper Great Southern regions.

Although there has been an increase in interest in topics such as transition from school to work, career education, and job aspirations of young persons, few studies have concentrated on primary school children in rural contexts. This study does so. It is anticipated that the findings will contribute to understanding how social knowledge is transmitted. More specifically, it will address the vital nexus between education and work in a particular social context. Through an understanding of the relationship between the child, his social and educational environments, and his developing concepts of work, progress can be made toward curriculum processes for careers education and occupational choice.

Publications and Reports

PUBLICATIONS

Darnell, Frank and Simpson, Patricia M. (eds), *Rural Education: In Pursuit of Excellence*. Selected papers from the National Conference 'New Directions in Rural Education', organised by the Education Department of Western Australia and OECD/CERI. Nedlands: National Centre for Research on Rural Education, University of Western Australia, 1981.

Darnell, F., 'Rural Education: A New Research Centre Looks at Some Perennial Problems', in R. F. Broadbent (ed.), *Education of the Isolated*. Melbourne: The Australian College of Education, 1981.

Darnell, F. and Higgins, A., 'Factors and Issues in Australian Rural Education: A Case for New Perspectives', in R. K. Brown and L. E. Foster (eds), *Sociology of Education: Australian and New Zealand Studies*. Melbourne: MacMillan (publication date late 1982).

Davis, J., *Program Organization in Western Australia's District High Schools*. Research Series No. 1. Nedlands: National Centre for Research on Rural Education, University of Western Australia, 1982.

REPORT

Tomlinson, D., Murray, I. and Wilson, S., 'The Karratha Study: English Language Needs of Adult Migrants in the Karratha Region'. A report to the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, June 1982.

Contact with Organizations Involved in Rural Education

The Centre has established contact with the following persons and agencies which have demonstrated links with rural education.

UNIVERSITIES

Dr John Davis
Field Services and Extension
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
Toronto, Ontario, CANADA

Professor Naomi L. Hersom
Dean of Education
University of Saskatchewan
CANADA

Dr Peter J. Murphy
Faculty of Education
University of Victoria
British Columbia, CANADA

Dr Pamela Young
Department of Educational Administration
University of London Institute of Education
LONDON

RURAL EDUCATORS AND RESEARCH AGENCIES

Aboriginal Training and Cultural Institute
Balmain, NSW
(Margaret Valadian, Director)

Australian Council for Educational Research
(John P. Keeves, Director)

Centre for Rural and Educational Improvement
University of Wisconsin
Monroe, Wisconsin, USA
(Ray Szymanski, Director)

OECD/CERI
(Mr G. S. Papadopoulos, Deputy Director for Education)

Rural Education Association
Colorado State University
(Joseph T. Newlin, Executive Director)

Rural Education and Development Inc.
Chapel Hill
North Carolina, USA
(Jonathan P. Sher, President)

Rural Education Project
Wheat Ridge, Colorado, USA
(Paul Nachtigal, Director)

OTHER AGENCIES

Education Commission of New South Wales
(F. W. Neville, Secretary)

Isolated Children's Parents' Association
(Rory Treweek, Federal President)

Research Activities

The principal function of the Centre is to research problems and issues in rural education. The work undertaken may involve any aspect of education or related fields that influence education in rural Australia, among any classification of rural residents. It might range from research topics which are specific and local in nature to others involving policy analysis at the state and Commonwealth levels leading to

changes in the course of education as a whole. It may be based on an expressed need that has immediate, practical application, or it may be pure research not necessarily bearing upon an observed problem.

Because the Centre has a dichotomous structure, its program must take into account several interests. University departments, for example, have a particular perception of what research groups are expected to do. Various rural organisations have specific problems they seek to ameliorate. Government departments concerned with education are primarily involved with the daily operation of school systems. Rural development agencies are sometimes unfamiliar with educational activities taking place in regions which are their principal concern. Thus, to serve these several interests, the Centre's program must include elements of pure research, applied research, and information dissemination. At the same time, it should serve as a catalyst by bringing together diverse groups of people in ways that foster new ideas. In short, the Centre must seek to develop and apply knowledge, and train people to a high level to produce practical solutions or options for the problems and issues of rural education.

The Board of Management has a significant coordinating function in giving direction to the research program so that the several functions of research are served. At its meeting on March 3, 1981 the board agreed that three general areas should form the basis of the Centre's research program:

- special education for physically and intellectually or emotionally handicapped children in small and isolated communities;
- problems associated with the education of itinerant children on correspondence; and
- education in mining communities.

Those areas of concern were reconsidered at a meeting on August 10, 1982.

In the light of developments over the preceding year, the following were adopted as guidelines for research to be undertaken as resources permitted:

- special education for physically and intellectually or emotionally handicapped children in small and isolated communities;
- education in mining communities;
- distance education and developments in educational technology; and
- small schools in rural communities.

In developing proposals within those general areas, account must be taken of the strengths and interests of the personnel employed at the Centre, or who might be recruited for particular projects and the finite resources available. The strategy which has been adopted is to incorporate in the program of re-

search three types of activities, categorised according to their source of funds: research undertaken as commissioned projects on behalf of other public or private agencies; projects for which special funds have been sought; and projects funded out of the Centre's core grant. Because the major portion of the grant from the university and the government of Western Australia is committed in advance to operating costs, scholarships and visiting fellowships, the allocation for the last type of research is relatively small. However, the director and the research fellow employed out of the core grant, are important resources and their research efforts are directed to the principal issues identified by the board as its primary areas of concern. Where financial assistance is granted by educational research foundations, public authorities or funding agencies, or by private sponsors, additional personnel will be employed to carry out the particular research activities. In this way the Centre will gather together a group of researchers with diverse interests and expertise, to investigate an extensive range of issues.

The following projects have been completed, or are in hand, in the first eighteen months of the Centre's work. They are additional to the activities of postgraduate scholars and visiting fellows.

COMMISSIONED RESEARCH

The Karratha Study: English Language Needs of Adult Migrants in the Karratha Region

In August 1981 the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs commissioned the Centre to undertake a survey of the English language needs of adult migrants living in the Karratha region. Principal responsibility for conducting the research rested with Mr Derrick Tomlinson, then a lecturer in the Department of Education. Miss Sandra Wilson and Mr Ian Murray were appointed as research assistants for the project. They were instrumental in conducting the field work. The report was submitted to the Secretary of the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs on June 14, 1982. This study was part of a series commissioned throughout Australia by the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs. The Committee to Review Post-arrival Programs and Services for Migrants (The Galbally Committee, 1978) estimated that 'a considerable backlog' of migrants who had been given little or no English instruction and who did not speak adequate English had accumulated between 1967 and 1977. To reduce that backlog and to upgrade existing courses, the committee recommended that program initiatives be undertaken on the basis of comprehensive reviews of need for English language teaching. The objectives of the Centre's project were:

- (i) to survey some of the social and economic characteristics of a representative sample of

the adult migrant population as they relate to English language performance and needs;

- (ii) to assess their proficiency in the four macroskills of English (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) in terms of the Australian Second Language Proficiency Rating (ASLPR) scale; and
- (iii) to assess the need for courses in English language as now provided by the Adult Migrant Education Services (AMES).

The survey interviewed 196 adult migrants in the Nickol Bay sub-region and included the towns of Karratha, Dampier, and Wickham. Thirty-six ethnic groups were represented in the sample. Other characteristics were:

- 72% were between 20 and 40 years of age;
- 33% had lived in Australia more than ten years and 9% less than one year;
- of those working, 7% were employed in the professional/clerical category, 26% in the skilled category, 58% in the unskilled category, and 6% were self-employed; and
- 60% had received some English language instruction before arrival in Australia.

The findings were that most of the migrants interviewed had less than social proficiency in all four of the macroskills. Their assessed proficiencies in reading and writing were markedly worse than in speaking (25% had oracy skills of less than survival level and 52% had literacy skills less than survival level). The evidence suggested that four in five could benefit from courses in spoken English, nine in ten in reading, and sixteen in seventeen in writing. On the basis of those findings, the report made three major recommendations for the establishment of adult migrant classes within the towns surveyed, the promotion of pre-service and in-service training of TESOL (Teachers of English for Speakers of Other Languages), and for the development of correspondence courses which make use of multi-modes of delivery (including broadcast or recorded television materials).

FUNDED RESEARCH

Commonwealth Schools Commission: Projects of National Significance **Correspondence Education: Priorities and Policies**

In March 1982 a proposal was submitted to the Schools Commission for funding under its Projects of National Significance program. The purpose of the project was to examine the educational needs of

country children enrolled with schools of the air and correspondence schools with a view to evaluating strategies for the improved delivery of services. The research will investigate how distance education services using multi-mode delivery of learning materials might meet the needs of children in small and isolated communities. Various combinations of the components of distance teaching will be investigated. These include print and post, itinerant teachers and peripatetic professional services, broadcast and recorded television material, radio and telephonic interaction, videotext and teletext transmission, and the role of micro-computers. The Schools Commission approved the project for funding and it is scheduled for completion in August 1983.

It is anticipated that many aspects of the education of children in rural areas will be canvassed in the course of the project, however the concern will be for those enrolled with correspondence schools and schools of the air. The principal focus will be the educational needs of students, rather than the systems of delivery. Experience in Australia and elsewhere has demonstrated the technical feasibility of correspondence lessons, itinerant teachers, and the use of electronic information processing and communications technology in distance education. Furthermore, it has been shown that these elements can be combined in various ways. Therefore, this study begins by recognising that flexible strategies are possible, and it will assess the feasibility of the various combinations in meeting the educational needs of individuals and small groups of students.

The project will have an Australia-wide focus in respect of some of its aims, but detailed treatment will be given to the participating states. The Education Departments of Western Australia, the Northern Territory and Queensland are cooperating in the project. It is being managed by the National Centre for Research on Rural Education, and a national steering committee chaired by Dr John Fitzgerald (Staff Inspector, Planning and Services in the Queensland Department of Education) has been appointed. Other members of the committee are Derrick Tomlinson (Director, NCRRE), Dr Norm Bowman (Research Branch, Northern Territory Department of Education), Dr Ted Hobbs (Research Branch, Queensland Department of Education) and Dr Jim Fitzpatrick (Research Branch, Education Department of Western Australia). The outcomes of the research will be useful to governments considering alternative policies for the future development of distance education.

CORE RESEARCH

Special education for physically and intellectually or emotionally handicapped children in small and isolated communities

One of the difficulties in developing programs to assist the education of handicapped children in rural areas is the problem of knowing where they are and what is the nature of their handicapping conditions. Recent surveys of special education and of handicapped persons in Australia have provided information about existing educational provisions and some enumerations of the prevalence in urban Australia of disabilities which impose schooling limitations, but there still remains to be established a data base of handicapped children in non-urban areas. At present, the prevalence or different kinds of disabilities among children in small and isolated communities cannot be predicted, but it is reasonable to assume the rural areas contain children with a wide range of physical, intellectual, psychological, and emotional disabilities, across a range of severity and spread over multiple levels of schooling.

The Uniting Church National Mission Frontier Services is conducting an Australia-wide survey of disabled children living in remote areas. This Centre is participating in that survey by coordinating the data collection in Western Australia. The agreement with the Uniting Church is that the Centre will have access to the information which is collected subject to normal provisions of confidentiality. When a reliable data base has been established further research can be undertaken into the home-based education of handicapped children in small and isolated communities.

The data collection for the current survey is in two parts. The first will identify disabled children in non-urban areas. That process will rely on the information already held by public and private agencies involved in the health, education and welfare of disabled children. It will require their cooperation, and from their combined resources a comprehensive data base will be established. The second phase will involve a survey of the parents to determine the nature of the children's disabilities, the extent to which their conditions impose educational handicaps, and the extent of support services available to them. The questions to be addressed in the project include:

1. What is the estimated number and nature of children of school age (6-18) and pre-school age (3-5) with educational handicaps in small and isolated communities
2. What are the existing services for the education of handicapped children? What do they provide and where are they available?
3. How many children are there for whom no special educational provision is made either

by government authorities or voluntary agencies?

4. What services are needed and how might they be provided?

Distance Education and Developments in Educational Technology

A research proposal on educational services for the new technology has been prepared by Dr Ian Birch and Dr Keith Punch of the University's Department of Education and the director of the Centre. The proposal outlines a comprehensive research program which will provide a set of guidelines for the most effective use of technology. Its intention is to assess the viability of various modes of delivering education through the new national satellite communications system and the terrestrial communications network to children in small and isolated communities. The research will address the following questions:

1. For whom, precisely, are the educational services intended?
2. What, precisely, are the educational services that can be delivered?
3. What are the most cost efficient and educationally effective ways of using the satellite for the delivery of educational services?
4. In what manner are the educational services to be developed and dispersed?
5. In addition to these questions, evaluation of both content and means of presentation of the services developed.

It is envisaged that two major periods will be embraced in the program: pre-satellite 1983-85 and post-satellite 1985 to 1990. The first would involve projects directed toward the identification and location of the target population, possible educational applications of the satellite communications system and associated technology, including the evaluation of various mixes of the new technology and traditional educational media, and the development of services. The second period from July 1985 to 1990, that is the first five years of the life expectancy of the first generation satellite, should be regarded as a period of experimentation in which innovations can be evaluated. The results of such research will give direction to the educational functions to be provided for in future satellite designs.

The proposal has been prepared by a joint steering committee of the Department of Education and the Centre, but it is intended that management of the project will rest with the Centre. The project, Correspondence Education: Priorities and Policies funded by the Schools Commission, is part of the overall program of research. Other proposals for related

research will be submitted to government authorities or private agencies for financial support of projects which are pertinent to their interests and responsibilities.

INFORMATION SERVICES

The Centre has established a collection of materials on many aspects of rural education. A catalogue referenced by author and subject is maintained. It is intended that this will be progressively transferred to computer tapes for ease of storage and retrieval. An electronically-stored bibliography will be developed in stages by areas of research interest. The first of these, a bibliography of distance education and the new technology, is being compiled from current holdings of other agencies and of materials held by the Centre.

National Clearinghouse on Distance Education and the New Technology

The motivation for this project came from the current interest in potential applications of the satellite communications system to education, particularly in remote areas. A number of individuals and organisations are looking to the development of educational strategies which will make use of the satellite system and its associated technology. The clearinghouse is being established to provide information which will allow anyone interested to know what work others are doing, particularly in research and evaluation, and to make contact with other workers. It will also provide a basis on which closer links may be developed between policy-makers, administrators, researchers and educators working in the field. A register of distance educators and researchers is being compiled and will be modified as information becomes available.

The functions of the clearinghouse are:

- to collect information on research and development in technology as it is applied to distance education;
- to structure the information for ease of access;
- to disseminate information;
- to maintain a current register of educators active in distance education and allied areas;
- to prepare and distribute an occasional newsletter.

A comprehensive bibliography of material relating to the application of technology to the delivery of educational services is being compiled. The information has been drawn from Australian, North American and European sources. It is stored on discs at the Regional Computing Centre at the University of Western Australia and is referenced by author, title and subject.

Prospect

In its first eighteen months of operation the Centre has undertaken research on major issues and problems in rural education. Its publications have been received favourably, both in Australia and overseas. Visiting scholars from Alaska and Canada have made valuable contributions to the Centre's activities and have increased its links with agencies overseas. Two scholarships have been awarded to research students to undertake investigation of particular aspects of rural education and the Centre's staff have participated in conferences attended by people with extensive interests in the field. Finally, the Centre has been a source of advice to public authorities, private agencies, and local communities about problems related to rural education. The work completed and the research in progress should confirm the expectation of its sponsors that it will contribute significantly to education in Australia's rural areas.

The Centre has established a presence in the field, and the tasks immediately before it are to diversify its program and consolidate its standing as a national research unit. These should not be regarded as necessarily separate. The directions for future development have been determined by the Centre's mode of operating: to initiate basic and applied research; to disseminate information about rural education; and to foster interest in the field by bringing together people to consider associated problems and issues. However, planning for future growth and development must take into account competition for scarce resources. The projects now in hand will absorb the bulk of funds currently available. It will be necessary if the Centre is to diversify its activities to seek assistance of two kinds: continuing grants which will enable confident forward planning and specific purpose payments for particular projects.

Two areas of research have not yet been broached, even though they were identified as major areas of concern; education in mining communities and small rural schools. A comprehensive proposal of research in a third area, distance education and the new technology, is in hand, but its realisation will depend upon attracting sufficient funds to assure worthwhile activities.

Given adequate financial assistance, the Centre will be able to gather around it a group of researchers, respected in their fields, and integrally involved in the Centre's activities. Some might be engaged directly in the program of research. Others might work independently, but through their interaction with the Centre's personnel and their participation in its activities, they will contribute directly to its standing as a vigorous research unit. The effects will be cumulative. The production of tangible and respectable outcomes will make the Centre a focus of

research from which the accumulated knowledge can be disseminated to a wide audience.

This last is important. The publications record of the first eighteen months has been modest but significant. The collection of conference papers, *Rural Education: In Pursuit of Excellence*, edited by Frank Darnell and Patricia Simpson, has attracted world-wide interest and the Centre has been complimented on its quality. The first of two research reports, 'The Karratha Study', has stimulated a pilot project by the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs to evaluate new methods of providing English language classes for adult migrants living in remote and isolated communities. The impact of the second, *Program Organization in District High Schools* (Research Series No. 1), is yet to be felt, but it is anticipated that it will make an important contribution to the reconsideration of curricula for Western Australia's secondary schools.

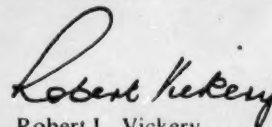
The process of disseminating information about rural education must be expanded. The audience should include researchers, administrators, teachers and parents directly involved in rural education. So that information can reach that audience quickly in a form that is accessible and easy to assimilate, the Centre should look to distributing a newsletter which contains a digest of current developments in the field.

Finally, to stimulate activity for research and development, a program of conferences to bring

together interested persons to share ideas and experiences must be undertaken. In July 1983 the Centre will jointly sponsor with the Education Department's Distance Education Centre a national seminar on distance education. Planning for that seminar is in hand. It could be the forerunner of a series. Other topics of national interest which could be developed as conference themes include agricultural education, education in mining companies, and teacher education for rural schools.

To achieve its aims, the Centre must be able to look forward to a program embracing at least two triennia. The first has been committed to the Centre's establishment. In the first year the Centre was commissioned, its personnel recruited, and its program of research planned. In the second year, a small but significant number of research projects have been initiated.

In the second triennium the Centre's efforts must be directed toward consolidating its place as a national research unit. Thereafter it should be able to look forward confidently to becoming a focus for education in rural areas.



Robert L. Vickery
Chairman,
Board of Management

Perth
October 1982